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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002777

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SUBJECT: PROTEST IN TBILISI SITREP NO. 4

REF: TBILISI 2774

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Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) This cable details the latest information regarding the November 7 government crackdown on opposition protests in Tbilisi, including Embassy EAC action. Currently, RSO reports that the Freedom Square and Rustaveli metro stations are closed. Major streets Rustaveli Avenue and Baratashvili Street are closed to vehicles. Many paramilitary units and military vehicles are present in the downtown area but it is not clear if the units are MOD or MOIA personnel. High schools and universities will remain closed until Monday, November 12.

State of Emergency Declared

¶2. (C) On November 8 at 1:00 a.m. local time Georgian Economic Development Minister Giorgi Arveladze announced that President Saakashvili imposed a country-wide state of emergency. He outlined restrictions on media freedom, demonstrations and strikes. The Parliament must convene within the next 48 hours to approve the presidential decree. Arveladze's announcement shortly followed one by Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava, who initially said the state of emergency would apply to Tbilisi only. On November 9, Deputy Speaker of Parliament Mikheil Machavariani said he hoped the tension will be discharged today and tomorrow, and the Parliament will not need to approve the state of emergency decree.

¶3. (C) According to the Georgian Constitution, the President can declare a State of Emergency "in the case of (among others) ...mass disorder, coup d'etat, and armed insurrection." A simple majority of Parliament must approve the state of emergency. According to the Georgian Constitution, during a state of emergency basic rights and freedoms can be suspended (including media, movement, property, and privacy rights) for the duration. The President's decrees carry the weight of law, and he is immune from impeachment charges during the state of emergency. No elections can be held in the nation, and Parliament must remain in session, during the state of emergency.

Independent Media Shut Down

¶4. (C) Arveladze said all television and radio news programs will be shut down for 15 days except for the publicly-funded Georgian Public Broadcaster. Newspapers and online media sources will continue to operate. Two "anti-government" TV channels, Imedi and Kavkaziya, were forced off the air in

Tbilisi on November 7. Independent TV station Channel 25 in Batumi was also switched off by the government around midnight. After Arveladze's announcement, Mze and Rustavi 2 both ceased all news coverage for the next 15 days. These TV companies continue broadcasting without news coverage.

¶15. (C) On November 7 around 21:00 hours Imedi Anchor, and former MP, Giorgi Targamadze reported on air that Interior Ministry Police were entering the building. Imedi then went off the air. Lewis Robertson, Chairman of Newscorp Caucasus and General Manager of Imedi, said approximately 150 "spetsnaz" entered the building. Robertson said the police fired rubber bullets and "totally destroyed" the Imedi control room (the Embassy has photos of the destroyed studio.) He said police told him Imedi would be closed for three months. Imedi station director Bidzina Baratashvili said journalists were allowed to leave the building at 22:00 and said no journalists were arrested, though Targamadze was briefly detained. Some Imedi staff, including Inga Grigolia, suffered tear gas exposure and were taken to the hospital. According to Robertson, many opposition party leaders were present at Imedi when the raid took place.

¶16. (C) Television station Kavkaziya, a strongly anti-government station covering Tbilisi, went off the air at around the same time. According to owner David Akubardia, the signal was cut at the transmitter. Akubardia said he received a visit from a businessman with close ties to the government, Avto Tserateli, who said the "spetsnaz" were planning a raid on Kavkaziya, but he was able to convince the authorities to cut the signal instead. Tserateli then offered Akubardia and his wife, Nino Jangirashvili, money in exchange for staying off the air for a week. Akubardia and his wife refused the money, took the most valuable equipment from the station to their home and the station remains off the air.

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Russian Diplomats Expelled

¶17. (C) Following Saakashvili's address on November 7, in which he said some diplomats from the Russian embassy were engaged in "subversive activities" against Georgia, the Georgian MFA declared three Russian diplomats persona non grata on November 8. They include: DCM Ivan Volinkin, Counselor Pavel Solomatin, and Third Secretary Kurenkov. On November 7 the Interior Ministry released taped audio and video purporting to show opposition leaders MP Levan Berdzenishvili (Republican Party), Giorgi Khaindrava (Equality Institute), Konstantine Gamsakhurdia (Freedom Party), and Shalva Natelashvili (Labor Party) cooperating with Russian counter-intelligence agents and conversing with the three expelled diplomats. Georgia has recalled its Ambassador to Russia, Irakli Chubinashvili, "for consultations in connection with recent developments in the country," according to the MFA.

Arrest and Injury Reports

¶18. (C) Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way) gave an interview in front of Imedi's barricaded studio. She said Kukha Kukhava (Conservative Party) and another opposition leader were arrested at Imedi; this has not been verified.

¶19. (C) According to the Health Ministry, approximately 500 people were taken to hospitals around Tbilisi. At the end of the day, approximately 94 remained in the hospital, including 24 policemen. Some civilians and police were badly injured. No deaths have been officially reported.

¶10. (C) Public Defender and Ombudsman Sozar Subari and his

staff were present at the November 7 demonstrations, and he personally was hit by police batons, sending him to the hospital. He later appeared multiple times on TV. Subaru's office is preparing a report on human rights violations that occurred during the protests.

EAC Meetings and Consular Report

¶11. (C) On November 8 Embassy EAC met for the second time. The EAC reviewed, and ordered a test of, the emergency communication networks, including telephone trees and cell phone SMS notifications. The EAC also reviewed and evaluated the status of the Embassy on tripwires and follow-on actions.

The Embassy will host a town hall meeting November 8 to review the latest information. The EAC will reconvene November 9.

¶12. (C) Embassy Conoff is establishing a call center in CONS for public information on security and travel, updating the Consular Information Sheet for Washington, and anticipates sending an additional warden message before COB today. They are also drafting a public announcement. CONS has received several inquiries from Amcits regarding the travel situation, and from Georgians regarding asylum or asking the USG to intervene in the situation.

TEFFT